



March 26, 2021

Connecticut General Assembly, Appropriations Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

American Lung Association's Testimony in Support of House Bill 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health

Dear Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Ruth Canovi and I am the American Lung Association's Director of Advocacy in Connecticut. The Lung Association appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Raised H.B. No 6662. The American Lung Association is the oldest voluntary public health association in the United States, currently representing the 37 million Americans living with lung diseases including asthma, lung cancer and COPD, including over 432,000 Connecticut residents. The Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through research, education and advocacy.

Data show¹ that black and brown communities bear a greater burden of lung disease than white communities. Social determinants of health really do have a large impact on our wellness and it is important to understand where the disparities in disease burden lay in order to achieve health equity. The American Lung Association's Public Policy Agenda includes, "Support investments and policies that eliminate health disparities caused by systemic racism; and build health equity across all policy areas."² HB6662 would recognize racism as a threat to public health and create a Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health. These are needed first steps to create health equity in Connecticut. For example, because of systemic racism throughout our country, communities of color are often exposed to greater air pollution and bear a higher burden of lung disease. While recognizing racism as a public health threat will not immediately alleviate these disparities, it does identify the threats that currently exist. This commission on disparities will identify systemic issues in place as well as policy changes that can improve health equity. We certainly recognize the need for this and know there are lots of areas to focus on that overlap with the mission of the Lung Association. Looking at asthma rates, air quality, the burden of tobacco as well as access to health care are all important places to look and institutional and systemic racism impact these public health issues. Racism itself is a major public health issue.

¹ American Lung Association. Trends in Lung Disease. Dec 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.lung.org/research/trends-in-lung-disease>

² American Lung Association. Public Policy Agenda for the 117th Congress (2021-2022). Accessed at: <https://www.lung.org/policy-advocacy/public-policy-agenda>

The American Lung Association in Connecticut supports HB 6662 and urges its swift passage.
Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Ruth Canovi, MPH
Advocacy Director, Connecticut

